Divine Presence in Absence

Aniconism and Multiple Imaging in the Prophets

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Discussions of divine presence in the Old Testament tend to focus on Deuteronomistic Name theology, in which the deity dwelt in the heavenly realm and the Name inhabited the temple as well as Kabod theology, more generally associated with the Priestly tradition, which held that the deity's presence resided in the temple, but was nevertheless mobile. Mounting evidence of the material cultural background and the iconography of the Old Testament world foreground that analyses of divine presence can take place on another level altogether.[1] Because of the biblical emphasis on aniconic religious expressions in the cult, whether true in actuality or not, discussions of divine presence (and indeed, absence) tend to overlook the important role of iconography. The present study examines attitudes to and policies related to iconographical expressions of divine presence and their relation to the absence of deities and Yahweh with particular attention to the rhetoric employed in the prophetic literature. A further interest is how biblical aniconic rhetoric construes divine absence, at least with respect to deities other than Yahweh. Aniconism is understood within this context similarly to the definition of programmatic aniconism put forward by Mettinger that can be thought of as consisting of three elements: the active repudiation and abolishment of items of worship in a religious context through physical action (e.g., the destruction of iconographic symbols), the institution of legal prohibitions, and the implementation of rhetorical strategies.[2] While most attention has focused on the religio-historical back-

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[1] See many of the outstanding collections of material produced by the so-called Fribourg School, including KEEL, Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik; SCHROER, In Israel gab es Bilder; KEEL and UEHLINGER, Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole; UEHLINGER, Images as Media. For a recent and thorough review of iconographic research with the aim to create a methodological approach, see DE HULSTER, Iconographic Exegesis 2009.

[2] METTINGER, No Graven Image?, 18.

ground of the first and the development of the second, only a small meas-
ure of attention has been concerned with the last, especially with respect to
the polemics against idol passages in the prophets. The Old Testament evi-
dences a wide variety of rhetorical strategies related to divine absence (and
aniconism) and divine presence that deserve renewed interest and analysis
at the present time.

In material terms the clearest indication of the presence of the deity in
the context of worship is through the use of a symbol or statue of or related
to the deity because idols were thought to be embodied with the divine.[3]
Moreover, the material culture of Iron Age Palestine has bequeathed a sig-
nificant number of artefacts that provide evidence of the widespread use of
iconography in religious observance. How these relate to the cult of Yah-
weh worship is still debated, but their prevalence in Iron Age Judah and
Israel at least attests to the abundant use of images in public and private
religious contexts. If a cultic statue denotes divine presence than the lack
of a cultic statue has the potential to communicate divine absence. With
respect to divine absence, there are at least three rhetorical strategies pre-
sent in the prophetic literature: the correlation of Yahweh's presence and
the loss thereof to the worship of other deities, the removal of divinity
from cultic objects, and the potential absence of Yahweh brought about
through the eradication of Yahwistic[4] cultic objects and the image of the
deity. Because the abolition of Yahwistic cultic images did not actually
result in the loss of divine presence according to the biblical tradition, an
analysis of aspects of divine absence is followed by some reflections on
indications of divine presence in the prophetic books Hosea and Ezekiel,
which are two of the prophetic collections most exercised with the issue of
idolatry and iconography. The abandonment of the physical image resulted
in the mediation of divine presence through metaphorical speech – what I
refer to as multiple imaging.

1. Divine Absence

Divine absence in the prophetic literature includes the loss of Yahweh due
to the presence of other deities, the active campaign to distance divinity

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[3] Elaborate rituals to deify the image that had been constructed were implemented.
See BLACKMANN, The Rite of Opening the Mouth; WINTER, Idols of the King; BER-
LEJUNG, Washing the Mouth; BERLEJUNG, Die Theologie der Bilder.

[4] I refrain from using personal pronouns in conjunction with the deity in this context
not out of any personal conviction, but because I agree with KÖVECSES, Metaphor, 26
that to use personal pronouns to replace the word God requires a metaphorical under-
standing.

from constructed images in ritual use for other gods, and the loss of Yah-wistic cultic symbols and divine image.

Divine Absence by Association: The Loss of Yahweh's Presence

There is a clear correlation in the prophetic literature between the worship of deities in the form of idols and the loss of the presence of Yahweh.[5] In fact, this is one of the most consistent explanations for the fall of the two kingdoms and the (Yahweh's)[6] destruction of the temple in 587/6 BCE in the biblical tradition. One of the most vivid examples of the correlation between the loss of divine presence and the worship of idols occurs in the prophet Ezekiel's[7] vision of the impure temple (chs 8–11).[8] Roughly contemporaneous with Ezekiel according to the chronological framing of the book, the prophetic figure Jeremiah also associated the prevalence of idol worship with the loss of divine presence and the judgement of the temple (Jer 7.30; 32.34, cf. 7.1–8.3). Idol worship then leads to and results in divine absence, which is the exact opposite of its intention.[9] The use of images in worship denoted the presence of the divine and facilitated the interaction of the worshipers with the deity. However in the tradition of biblical Israel the use of idols in cultic ritual failed to achieve the results desired. Not only were other deities from the biblical point of view unable to come to the aid of people who worshiped them, Yahweh removed divine presence from among them as well. In some biblical traditions the worship of idols was even linked to the transfer of impurity that led to Yahweh's abandonment.[10]

Closely related to the correlation between the worship of images and the (ongoing) loss of Yahwistic divine presence is that the intervention of the

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[5] E.g., Hos 8.1–6; 13.1–3; Isa 2.6–8; Jer 1.16; 2.20–28; 11.10–13; Ezek 8.1–18.

[6] TOOMAN, Ezekiel's Radical Challenge, has argued that Ezekiel 8–11 is actually better understood as Yahweh's arrival at the temple site to destroy it against the consensus view that holds that the scene portrays Yahweh's departure from the temple to leave it to destruction.

[7] I use Ezekiel (and references to the prophet) here as shorthand to refer to the author(s) who are behind the biblical material associated with a prophetic figure called Ezekiel.

[8] I have argued elsewhere in MIDDLEMAS, Transformation of the Image, that the issue at stake for the prophetic figure Ezekiel in the four scenes at the temple site is best understood as idolatry. That this idolatry leads to (or has led to following the argument of TOOMAN, Ezekiel's Radical Challenge to Inviolability) the loss of the divine presence is clear by the movement of the presence of the deity on the mobile chariot throne away from the city of Jerusalem to hover ominously on its outskirts in Ezek 11.20.

[9] On similar dynamics in Exod 32, see MACDONALD, Recasting the Golden Calf.

[10] See GANZEL, Transformation, who has examined this correlation with particular attention to the Ezekiel tradition.

deity in a restorative way is predicated partly on the absolute abolishment of images, which signified the veneration of other deities (that took place either in addition to or in rejection of Yahwistic worship). In the final chapters of the book of Ezekiel, for example, which depict the restored and purified Jerusalem as well as a series of regulations to ensure a holy environment that would secure the deity's continued presence,[11] the deity is said to exclaim 'Now let them put away their idolatry and the corpses of their kings…and I will reside among them forever' (Ezek 43.9).[12] In addition, the condemnation of rampant idol worship among the people in Judah (from before and after the first deportation in 598 BCE) participates in the rhetoric of the book which transfers hope exclusively to the exiles in Babylon (and those deported along with Ezekiel).[13]

The prophetic collection attributed to Proto-Zechariah (chs 1–8) concentrates similarly on the behaviour and regulations required for the establishment of the community in the restored Jerusalem to which Yahweh will return and in which the deity will dwell.[14] Among the vision sequences in the collection is a scene in which a woman is ejected from Jerusalem and returned to the land of Shinar or Babylon. The woman represents the sinfulness of the people (v. 6) and is associated with idolatry (v. 8). Although she likely represents a goddess, it is unclear which goddess is in view.[15] The thrust of the passage is that the removal of idolatry from the homeland of Judah is a necessary accompaniment to the restoration that the prophet envisions as already taking place.[16]

Absenting the Divine

Another strategy has to do with the distancing of divinity from images fashioned by human hands or natural images occurring in nature. The biblical rhetoric emphasizes that deities represented by fixed forms do not represent 'real' gods that can enact change, move, or intervene in any way in the human realm. Edward Curtis summarizes this literary strategy in terms of contempt and ridicule,

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[11] LEVENSON, Theology of the Program; STEVENSON, Vision of Transformation.

[12] Unless otherwise stated, I refer to the NRSV.

[13] RENZ, Rhetorical Function.

[14] E.g., MARINKOVIC, What Does Zechariah 1–8 Tell Us.

[15] Relevant discussions of the woman in the Ephah and her possible signifiers include. MEYERS AND MEYERS, Haggai, Zechariah 1–8, 301–309, 313–316; UEHLINGER, Die Frau im Efa; UEHLINGER, Figurative Policy, 344–347; MIDDLEMAS, Troubles of Templeless Judah.

[16] On the apocalyptic elements of the prophecy, see COOK, Prophecy and Apocalypticism, 123–165 (esp. 127–129).

Images are…an abomination. They make the people and nation using them unclean, and so they are likened to other sources of impurity: dung, detestable things, dead bodies. They are useless and ineffective, they have no life in them, they are wood, stone, they are vapour and vanity. They are deceptive, they cannot do what their worshipers ask of them; they only disappoint and embarrass those who trust them.[17]

According to the biblical books that bear their names the prophets warned against confusing objects made by human hands and even natural objects like the sun or the moon with deities. A polemical stance against idols is especially apparent in Jeremiah (Jer 1.16; 2.27–28; 10.1–6, 8–9, 14–15; 50.2; 51.17–18) and Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40.19–20; 41.6–7; 44.9–20) as exemplified in the thorough examination of the polemical passages against idols by Michael Dick.[18] Dick finds that three rhetorical strategies were employed to dissuade the worship of other deities in Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah; the deity becomes the idol so that it is represented as having no independent divine power, human agency is highlighted in the manufacture of other people's idols, and the raw materials from which the idols are fashioned were also parodied as profane. A representative passage in Jeremiah reflects this three-fold emphasis on the material used for the idol's production, its human construction, and the void of divine presence:

a tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an axe by the hands of an artisan; people deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammers and nails so that it cannot move. Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk (Jer 10.3b-5a).

The association of deities other than Yahweh with the workmen who produce them from raw materials is found elsewhere in the prophetic corpus (e.g., Hos 8.4–6; 13.2–3; 14.4 [14.3]; Ezek 5.11; 20.7–8; 22.3–4; Mic 5.12–13 [5.13–14]; Hab 2.18–19) and seems to be consistent with the biblical view of other deities and their veneration more generally. Hosea, for example, is well known for parodying idols as the work of human hands (Hos 4.12; 8.4, 6; 10.6). The passages against idols in Hosea anticipate in some respects the polemical passages against idols found in Isaiah and Jeremiah.[19] Note the comments made by Mauchline many years ago:

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[17] CURTIS, Theological Basis, 280. The article contains a useful overview of the references to idol worship in the Old Testament, but maintains the biblical line on the antiquity of the divine prohibitions against images.

[18] DICK, Prophetic Parodies. See also the treatment of some of the relevant passages by CLIFFORD, Function of the Idol and PREUSS, Verspottung fremder Religionen. LEVTOW, Images of Others, also considers some of the relevant idol passages in his concern to illuminate the socio-political motivation of what he terms the icon parodies.

[19] See for example, METTINGER, The Veto on Images. The priority of the Hosea passages depends to some extent on how much they are considered original or secondary. Both NISSINEN, Prophetie, Redaktion und Fortschreibung and YEE, Composition and Tradition, regard many of the polemical idol passages as secondary.

More uncompromisingly than any of his contemporary fellow prophets, Hosea condemns idolatry. He disparages images as the work of men's hands…Even the greatest image of them all, the calf image of Bethel, will at the last be carried away like splinters of wood upon the surface of the waves.[20]

And Toews has argued that the aniconic tendency in Hosea is directly related to the bull calf iconography and that it formed the basis for the polemic against Jeroboam's bull iconography in 1 Kgs 12 (cf. Hos 8.1–6; 10.1–6; 13.1–3).[21] In Hosea the bull calf images no longer functioned to represent the deity but became the objects of worship themselves.[22] The depiction of the worshipers kissing the calf image in Hos 13.2 underscores the confusion of the deity and the object.

These types of parodies of idols align well with a rhetorical strategy found in the book of Ezekiel whereby the lemma used for deities other than Yahweh connoted something profane and not divine.[23] While reserving the term אלהים (God) exclusively for Yahweh and in distinction to the rhetoric of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History where the veneration of other deities was characterized as going after 'other gods', אלהים אחרים, Ezekiel labels other deities profane objects with three favourite terms being שקוצים 'detestable things', תועבות 'abominations', and גלולים 'dung'.[24] Similarly, in the prophecies attributed to Hosea the worship of Baal(s) is likened to the worship of idols without efficacy (Hos 9.10; 11.2; 13.1, cf. 7.16; 11.7).[25]

With respect to the conceptualization of deities other than Yahweh in the prophetic literature, examples of divine absence include the correlation of the lack of Yahweh's protective and sustaining presence to the worship of other deities and the idols utilized in their veneration, the failure of Yahweh's return and implementation of divine restoration because of the continued presence of other deities and their idols, and the loss of the divinity of deities fashioned as idols. Representations of deities are devoid of divine presence. Through satirical denunciations of other deities as inert objects, the prophets insist on divine absence – both of the other deities and of Yahweh.

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[20] MAUCHLINE, Hosea, 555.

[21] TOEWS, Monarchy and Religious Institution.

[22] TOEWS, Monarchy and Religious Institution, 168.

[23] KUTSKO, Between Heaven and Earth; KUTSKO, Ezekiel's Anthropology.

[24] GANZEL, Transformation, 36–43, also contains a useful list and discussion of these terms.

[25] Various emendations have been offered to ease textual difficulties in 7.16 and 11.7. A correction to Baal in both makes good sense in the passages and in the context of the book. See the commentaries and DAY, Hosea and the Baal Cult, 212–213.

Loss of Images in Yahwistic Worship

A further rhetorical strategy related to the issue of divine presence and absence is the loss of images in the context of Yahwistic worship such that the deity Yahweh was not considered present in or representable by images.[26] It is clear in the prophetic literature that certain cultic objects used in the temple to direct attention to the deity or represent the presence of Yahweh were eventually eradicated literarily.[27] Elements connoting divine presence are actively made absent. Their absence according to the biblical writers, though, would not also indicate the loss of the presence of Yahweh as it had with the divine figures of other deities. Nevertheless, in the prophetic literature there are instances where active aniconism (the institution of rhetorical strategies to abolish cultic images used in worship) results in the loss of physical symbols representative of the presence of Yahweh within the textual presentation. As such, aniconism represents an aspect of or functions as a type of divine absence through its insistence on the lack of images to portray the sustaining presence of the deity. Unease with images representative of the presence of Yahweh in the temple will be examined with regards to the cherubim throne[28] and the ark of the covenant that is, the two objects most clearly indicative and expressive of the presence of Yahweh in the First Temple as well as the menorah of the second. Iconoclastic rhetoric is also apparent with respect to an image of Yahweh.

The most obvious example of the loss of an image in the context of Yahweh worship occurs in conjunction with the cherubim throne, which appears as the deity's mobile throne chariot in the book of Ezekiel. In the three visions of the divine (Ezek 1–3, 8–11, 40–48) that form a skeleton for the book, a telling development with respect to the mobile throne chariot is noticeable. The chariot is visible in the first two visions and is clearly intended to be a visual representation, even a manifestation, of the deity's throne associated with Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 6–8), but the depiction is certainly influenced by Canaanite/Phoenician art forms as Keel

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[26] This is not the context in which to engage in the debate about whether there was a cult statue of Yahweh in the Jerusalem temple. There is growing textual and material evidence, especially when the literary record is examined in light of the material evidence, that points in this direction. See NIEHR, In Search of Yhwh's Cult Statue; UEHLINGER, Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary, 148–149, for biblical allusions to Yahweh's cult statues. For a different interpretation of the material evidence, see DICK, Prophetic Parodies, 4–7; LEWIS, Divine Images; NA'AMAN, No Anthropomorphic Graven Image.

[27] The following arguments draw on two articles where this strategy is examined in the book of Ezekiel, MIDDLEMAS, Exclusively Yahweh; MIDDLEMAS, Transformation.

[28] For a recent study of the cherubim which challenges the dominant view, see WOOD, Of Wings and Wheels.

has argued.[29] In the book of Ezekiel the mobile throne chariot suddenly disappears. Given that it is the source of a great deal of illustration and description in the first two visions (1.5–28; chs 9–10, esp. 10.1, 9–14, 20–22, 11.22), its abrupt loss in the final vision of the collection is suggestive. When the deity's presence is visualized returning to the restored and purified Jerusalem, the chariot throne is neither described nor even mentioned: it does not accompany Yahweh on the deity's return or resume its place in the temple (43.2–5, cf. 40.1–3). The cherubim with which it is associated are located only on the walls of the sanctuary (Ezek 41.17–20, 25), which is only one of the locations consistent with their presence in the Kings account of the temple. The locution of the throne chariot in the final chapters of Ezekiel emphasizes that there will be no representative image to indicate the presence of Yahweh in the purified temple envisioned by the prophet.[30] Its omission appears as the culmination of a firm stance against images seen at work throughout the collection.

The aniconic sentiments found in the book of Ezekiel are most clear with respect to the cherubim throne, but it is also the case that the rhetorics of the book reveal the loss of the other important visual symbol of Yahweh in the First Temple – the ark of the covenant. Although the ark never appears in the book of Ezekiel, language associated with it is co-opted for the restored and purified temple, which is spoken of as the footstool of the deity in 43.7.[31] The absence of the ark and the use of its imagery in connection with the temple participate with other rhetorical strategies in the book of Ezekiel that distance physical images from the deity.[32] The ark is effectively eradicated as a viable object of worship in the Second Temple. Its loss is consistent with other thought relating to the period like that attributed to the prophetic figure Jeremiah, 'they shall no longer say, "the ark of the covenant of Yahweh". It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed, nor shall another one be made' (Jer 3.16).

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[29] KEEL, Jahwe-Visionen, 37–45; METZGER, Königsthron und Gottesthron; METTINGER, No Graven Image? See METTINGER, Elusive Essence, 397, for a response to Metzger's hypothesis that the cherubim stood to hold the throne in the Jerusalem temple.

[30] This point is argued in more detail in MIDDLEMAS, Exclusively Yahweh, 310–312.

[31] ZIMMERLI, has a fairly involved discussion of this verse and the loss of the ark that deserves further attention in another study. What is interesting in connection with the argument presented here is that his reconstruction of the ark tradition suggests that Ezekiel's use of ark language for the temple is consistent with the tradition of Yahweh enthroned on the ark known from 1 Sam 4.4; 2 Sam 6.2, but is to be distinguished in that the ark does not appear. The temple takes over the function of the ark. Furthermore, locating the presence of Yahweh in the Holy of Holies without the ark provides a counter (almost revolutionary in its conceptualization) to the traditions of Yahweh's presence found in Isaiah (chs 6 and 66), P, and Jeremiah.

[32] On what may have happened to the actual ark itself, see DAY, Whatever Happened.

The cherubim throne and the ark of the covenant were abolished as viable symbols of divine presence because of growing animosity towards the use of images in worship[33] (of other deities which were not considered to be gods, but whose appearance, nevertheless, resulted in the loss of Yahweh's divine presence according to the biblical line of thought). The employment of literary strategies to eradicate symbols used in the cult of Yahweh like the cherubim throne and the ark of the covenant, but not representative of the deity, support to some extent Mettinger's contention that tolerance to images not fashioned in a divine form (which he calls *de facto* aniconism) gradually shifted towards a campaign to abolish images, symbols, and other cultic representations (his programmatic aniconism).[34]

However, there is another possibility with respect to the motivation behind the eradication of the cherubim throne and the ark. The throne and the footstool, although not actually representing the *morphé* of Yahweh, nevertheless, provided one very concrete way of visualizing the deity – as a human being.[35] Concerns about the anthropomorphic representation of Yahweh appear in addition to prophetic rhetoric that satirized other deities as images made by human hands and that debased idols with a variety of terms evoking disgust. Twice in the book of Ezekiel which is exercised with the issue of idolatry prophetic discourse includes idols fashioned as men among its critique. In the allegories of Jerusalem and Samaria one of the many things of which the women are accused is the worship of idols crafted as men (זכר in 16.17; אנשים who appeared like the Chaldeans in 23.14).[36] A similar line of reasoning is found also in Deutero-Isaiah, where the idea is that anthropomorphic images are not divine (Isa 44.3)[37] as well as in the book of Hosea where it is explicitly stated that Yahweh is not a man, איש (Hos 11.9). The loss of the cherubim throne and ark of the covenant as cultic symbols in the prophetic literary record resulted in the aboli-

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[33] A fine study of the development of the widening of the legal tradition to include restrictions against more and more images is that of DOHMEN, Das Bilderverbot.

[34] METTINGER, No Graven Image?, 18. Note his response to criticisms of this view in METTINGER, Israelite Aniconism and the reviews by LEWIS, Divine Images and Aniconism; UEHLINGER, Israelite Aniconism in Context.

[35] For the connection between views towards kingship and aniconic tendencies, see HENDEL, The Social Origins; EVANS, Cult Images; HENDEL, Aniconism and Anthropomorphism.

[36] This may provide some explanation for why the city of Jerusalem no longer appears figuratively as a woman and is even renamed 'Yahweh is there' (43.5) in the final chapters of the book as argued in MIDDLEMAS, Transformation of the Image, 123–127. On the disappearance of female Jerusalem in Ezekiel, see DAY, Adulterous Jerusalem's Imagined Demise; GALAMBUSH, Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel.

[37] Noted also among the rhetorical strategies of Deutero-Isaiah in DICK, Prophetic Parodies, 30 n. 54.

tion of imaging Yahweh after a human body, thus resulting in the eradication of a concrete visual aid of divine presence.

The removal of symbolic representations that provided a means to visualize the deity in a concrete way finds support in that at least one of the symbols indicative of divine presence in the Second Temple period in the prophetic literature evokes the idea of presence without form. The most likely case for the erection of another image in the context of worship to represent Yahweh's presence is the menorah as found in Zech 4.1–14.[38] The menorah is a cultic object of a different kind than the cherubim throne and the ark of the covenant that conveyed a divine physical and human form. That the cherubim throne could provide a very clear way to visualize Yahweh is no more apparent than in the book of Ezekiel where the image of a human being actually rides the mobile throne chariot (1.26). Both Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel contain explicit condemnations of divine images in the shape of men, but note also that the reticence to equate Yahweh with a human being occurs in the book of Hosea. Within parts of the biblical tradition any image hinting at an actual anthropomorphic shape of the deity was discouraged or even forbidden. The menorah could remain, as could the cherubim on the walls of the sanctuary, as symbolic representations because they convey nothing of the form of Yahweh.[39] The menorah would in fact emphasize the fluid, amorphous, and mixed representations of Yahwistic presence found in the vision sequences in Ezekiel – the fire and mixed form in Ezekiel 1.27 and 8.2 as well as the rainbow in 1.28. What differentiates the menorah is that it provides no way to visualize the deity in a concrete and stable form, as would the other images suggestive of Yahweh appearing with a human body. Instead its use in the temple would function somewhat akin to the British flag that flies over Buckingham palace when the Queen is in residence by indicating presence, but not form.[40] The use of formless representations is consistent with strategies to abolish Yahwistic cultic symbolic representations that implied one stable and fixed divine image.

An extreme reluctance to depict Yahweh in any fixed form suggests that it is not just images associated with the deity that disappear in rhetorical strategies to bolster aniconism, but also an image of Yahweh.[41] Indeed, a

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[38] NIEHR, In Search of Yhwh's Cult Statue, has argued that a cult statue of Yahweh existed in the Jerusalem temple before its destruction in 587/6 BCE Although there are some suggestions in the biblical material to support this perspective, his use of the menorah in Zechariah serves less to advance his case.

[39] The Bread of the Presence could also be considered similarly.

[40] I wish to thank Nathan MacDonald for his suggestion of this example.

[41] SCHMIDT, The Aniconic Tradition, seeks to show that a re-examination of certain texts in the Pentateuch hint at the possibility of a cultic image of the deity and that this

stable, fixed, and anthropomorphic image of Yahweh is abolished through a number of complementary rhetorical strategies in the book of Ezekiel.[42] Firstly, the depiction of the deity in human form, as male, is downplayed. In the first prophetic vision of the deity, Ezekiel is reported to have seen the divine form figured as אדם (1.26). However, the second vision with its inclusion of impersonal details in the description of the deity's effulgence like fire[43] and light immediately destabilizes the resoluteness made possible by the reference to a human being (8.2).[44] The image of Yahweh as an אדם (1.26) is actually already subverted within its literary context by being referred to also as a rainbow in a summary of the vision (1.28). In Ezek 1.28 the likeness of the deity as a rainbow emphasizes the fluid and amorphous nature of the divine image. In fact, Ezek 1.28 employs the most concrete language in its description of the divine presence through the choice and order of the terms employed: 'like the likeness (כמראה) of the bow that will be in the cloud on a rainy day so is the likeness of the shining all around; it is *the likeness of the appearance* (הוא מראה דמות) of the presence (כבוד) of Yahweh.'[45] Secondly, many different images for the deity, even a type of mixed form in which the deity is described as having a rough bodily shape in which the lower half is fire and the upper half is gleaming amber (1.26–27; 8.2), appear as descriptors in the vision sequences of divine presence. Although it has been argued that when visualized Yahweh's

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image could have been a *Mischwesen*, mixed form. The abolishment of an image over the course of the book of Ezekiel might also hint in this direction.

[42] For more detailed discussions of these points, see MIDDLEMAS, Exclusively Yahweh, 314–320; MIDDLEMAS, Transformation, 127–136.

[43] I have argued elsewhere that the Septuagint translation of 'man' in the second vision is inconsistent with the rhetoric of Ezekiel and that fire makes more sense in the context. See, MIDDLEMAS, Exclusively Yahweh, 317–320; MIDDLEMAS, Transformation, 129–134.

[44] NIELSEN, The Variety of Metaphors, 151–159, has examined how impersonal (non-human) metaphors for Yahweh destabilize the narrow image of God as a human being in the Psalter.

[45] A close analysis of the terms דמות and מראה as used in the book of Ezekiel MIDDLEMAS, Exclusively Yahweh, 318–319 reveal that דמות is used to define something more specifically and מראה speaks of something abstract with the general appearance of something else. When found in an expression of the vision of the כבוד יהוה 'the glory/presence of Yahweh' in 1.26; 8.2, the unique expression כמראה דמות 'the form like the general appearance of' evidences the use of a more specific term followed by a term denoting something more general in appearance. In conjunction with Yahweh's form, there is a serious attempt to distance the divinity from any fixed form, except in 1.28 where the two terms are found in reverse order. The reference to Yahweh's form being like a rainbow in 1.28 is actually the only instance in Ezekiel in which the terms מראה and דמות are found in the order of the abstract word before the specific. So, the form most like the representation of Yahweh is the rainbow, not the man of 1.26 or even the fiery form of 1.27.

bodily form was understood to essentially be like that of a man,[46] at least in the book of Ezekiel the focus is on different images of the deity without a priority given to any one and the greatest impression comes from the image of the rainbow – that which cannot be given a definitive shape. Finally, a form of the deity fails to return with the divine presence to the restored and purified temple in Jerusalem. The deity in the final chapters of Ezekiel is heard, never seen. As with the mobile throne chariot this literary strategy signifies the lack of the return of a divine image and raises to the foreground the importance ascribed to the role of divine proclamation. The book of Ezekiel presses towards the promotion of the word as the conveyor of divine presence. Both van der Toorn[47] with attention to the Torah and Sweeney[48] in conjunction with the book of Isaiah have highlighted the importance of the divine word as a replacement for the figuration of the deity Yahweh in the Second Temple period. The book of Ezekiel contributes to the promotion of the word of Yahweh instead of an image.

The loss of the figuration of Yahweh in any stable form is also likely found in the prophetic tradition in conjunction with the bull calves established at Bethel in the book of Hosea. The bull statues found condemned in Hosea (8.5–6; 10.5–6; 11.2) are more compellingly understood as statues of Yahweh (perhaps incorporating the traditions of El) and not pedestals on which the invisible presence of the deity stood.[49] They are considered only the work of human hands (Hos 8.6) and are thus to be destroyed. The emphasis in Hosea on the human construction of images that remain inert and powerless contradicts Schmidt's note that the anti-image rhetoric of Hosea is related to the use of the wrong image of Yahweh, rather than images in general.[50] Because the bull statues were interpreted as images representing Yahweh, they were condemned to destruction. That the northern kingdom of Israel had divine cultic idols has received some support from an analysis of the Nimrud Prism of Sargon II made by Becking in recent years.[51]

There is a clear prophetic stance against the use of images in worship as well as the conscious attempt to distance what is divine from any image. These strategies function to create an aniconic ideal in the prophetic literature, somewhat akin to the emphasis on prohibitions against images in

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[46] MILLER, In the 'Image' and 'Likeness'. Cf. KUTSKO, Ezekiel's Anthropology.
[47] VAN DER TOORN, The Iconic Book.
[48] SWEENEY, The Book of Isaiah.
[49] WEIPPERT, Gott und Stier; CURTIS, Some Observations on 'Bull' Terminology, 22–25; METTINGER, Israelite Aniconism, 189–192; DAY, Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses, 39–41. Cf. DOHMEN, Das Bilderverbot, 147–153; SCHROER, In Israel gab es Bilder, 81–104.
[50] SCHMIDT, The Aniconic Tradition, 78 n. 11.
[51] BECKING, Assyrian Evidence.

the legal material of the Pentateuch.[52] In addition, when aniconism is understood with particular reference to Yahweh, as an active attempt to eradicate physical symbols for the deity as well as to eliminate the possibility of a stable and fixed image for Yahweh's *morphé* in the shape of a human being, it shares commonality with other biblical rhetoric exercised with issues of divine absence. The image of Yahweh and representative images appropriate to a cultic context were made absent through rhetorical strategies, but did their loss also convey the absence of Yahweh?

We know from religious texts from other ancient Near Eastern cultures that the use of a cultic statue in worship coexisted with a rich and varied descriptive, metaphorical language for the divine.[53] In the biblical tradition an abundance of divine metaphors occurs in material particularly concerned with the issue of idolatry. We turn to explore the use of metaphor – what I call multiple imaging – and divine presence as a means to assess how Yahweh was made present in the context of divine absence.

2. Divine Presence

Although there were several rhetorical strategies evident in the prophetic material related to divine absence, the stance against images of Yahweh was one of the most striking means of making absent a divine image. At the same time, however, the clearly aniconic stance noticeable in Hosea and Ezekiel did not simultaneously result in belief in the loss of divine presence. This may be due partly to the wide variety of metaphors for the deity Yahweh that paradoxically abound in texts particularly focused on the issue of idolatry. This last section explores in a preliminary way the connection between the loss of physical symbols to indicate the presence of Yahweh and the employment of metaphorical speech or multiple imaging. On a few occasions it has been observed that there is a correlation between aniconic sentiments and the use of metaphor. For instance, Carroll commented in his survey of aniconic thought in the Hebrew Bible that, 'the images liberated by the rejection of idolatry are metaphorical.'[54] In addition, the concept of the incomparability of the deity Yahweh, which is

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[52] The most thorough analysis of the legal material to date is that of DOHMEN, Das Bilderverbot.

[53] KORPEL, A Rift in the Clouds, for a study of this phenomenon with the Ugaritic materials and their relation to Old Testament metaphors. This phenomenon is also well attested in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Cf. CORNELIUS, Many Faces of God.

[54] CARROLL, The Aniconic God, 57.

clearly related to the strategies explored with respect to divine absence, has been connected with the development of a variety of divine metaphors.[55]

Attention to the employment of metaphorical speech about God within the context of anti-idolatry material has also been observed by Brown in his study of divine imagery found in the Psalter. In conjunction with his discussion of Psalm 139 he suggests the possibility that multiple images of the deity can be employed as a defence against the charge of idolatry.[56] He notes in his analysis that an emphasis on the transcendence of Yahweh made at its beginning (v. 1) is matched by a variety of metaphors that portray a close relationship between the divine and the psalmist. Figurative speech conceptualizes Yahweh in diverse ways and includes images drawn from the juridical realm in the likening of Yahweh to a judge, advocate, scribe, bounty hunter, and attacker and the personal sphere in the likening of Yahweh to a guide, partner, sun, weaver, and procreator.[57] Brown's analysis of Psalm 139 actually concludes his survey of divine imagery in the Psalter with,

Yet for all the iconic characteristics ascribed to the divine, the psalmist, even though an accused idolater, never loses sight of God's unattainable transcendence. Indeed, the very fluidity with which the psalm moves from metaphor to metaphor serves his defense well. He is not fixed on any one image.[58]

Brown's insights with respect to how metaphor functions within the Psalter serves as a challenge to explore the link between divine metaphors and aspects of divine presence. Furthermore, it raises the interesting possibility that imagery could be employed as an aniconic strategy in order to speak against the stabilization of any one image of the deity and concomitantly for divine immanence. A brief introduction to metaphor theory and an overview of the use of metaphor in Ezekiel and Hosea provide some preliminary reflections to assist in exploring how metaphor generates divine presence in the midst of rhetoric of divine absence.

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[55] CARROLL, The Aniconic God, 51; DEL BRASSEY, Metaphor and the Incomparable God; BRETTLER, Incompatible Metaphors. The classic study is that of LABUSCHAGNE, The Incomparability of Yahweh.

[56] BROWN, Seeing the Psalms, 207–212.

[57] He suggests further that many of the images are linked through the concept of the deity's hand. The phraseology of the divine hand does not actually purport to represent the form (*morphé*) of the deity as argued by BARR, Theophany and Anthropomorphism. Further, in MIDDLEMAS, Exclusively Yahweh, 315–316, an examination of the uses of the divine hand in the book of Ezekiel shows that they do not convey anything about the divine form. Instead, they: (1) convey something about the prophetic experience, (2) indicate Yahweh's interaction with the prophet, (3) point towards the enactment of judgement or salvation, and (4) appear in a particular oath formula as a clear statement about Yahweh's actions for or against ancient Israel.

[58] BROWN, Seeing the Psalms, 212.

Metaphor Theory

New ways of considering metaphor[59] suggest that it can be understood in ways evocative of divine presence, in that metaphor is considered to have rhetorical and cognitive force whereby the reader/hearer participates in the creation of meaning.[60] In current metaphor theory and within its application to studies of biblical literature, metaphor is understood as a cognitive event, rather than, or in addition to, being understood as a literary phenomenon.[61] That is, two dissimilar terms equated in a phrase require some effort on the part of an interpreter to establish meaning. That there must be some type of disjunction between the terms is an important aspect of metaphor as it is incongruity that invites reflection and interpretation. Moreover, an interaction between two dissimilar objects or thoughts takes place in metaphor such that two ideas are active, bringing together meaning,[62] between a tenor (the subject of the metaphor) and its vehicle (a term or idea that sheds new light on what the tenor is or can be perceived to be).[63] Both parts of the metaphor bring to their union associated commonplaces or in other words ways that the interpreter understands the concepts employed from her/his cultural backgrounds. Metaphors are, therefore, understood relationally or contextually (Kittay)[64] and mappings of knowledge take place that inform the meaning of the whole (Lakoff, Johnson, and

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[59] SOSKICE, Metaphor and Religious Language, 15, offers a succinct definition of metaphor as 'a figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another'.

[60] Because the literature on metaphor theory is vast and the approaches utilized by biblical scholars are equally numerous, this section introduces aspects of metaphor theory that have particular relevance for an examination of how metaphors contribute a sense of divine presence rhetorically. For an overview of many of the studies incorporating metaphor theory in biblical analyses, see VAN HECKE, Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible, 1 n. 2.

[61] MACKY, The Centrality of Metaphor, holds a middle ground between a purely rhetorical approach to metaphor and a cognitive one. He is correct with respect to the biblical material because metaphors appear in texts and texts are studied rhetorically, but the effect they achieve on an interpreting audience is an important contribution of cognitive studies. Since the biblical texts have been and are used and re-used in cultic settings, a literary and cognitive approach fits the material better.

[62] RICHARDS, The Philosophy of Rhetoric; BLACK, Models and Metaphors; BLACK, More About Metaphor.

[63] I am using Richards' originally designations, tenor and vehicle, as they are found frequently among biblical interpreters; however, there are other terms to denote these phenomena which have gained adherents in recent years, e.g., 'target domain' and 'source domain' (BROWN, Seeing the Psalms, 5–6) or 'photo' and 'frame' (MOUGHTIN-MUMBY, Sexual and Marital Metaphors, 1–16).

[64] KITTAY, Metaphor.

Turner).[65] In addition, filtering takes place in the interaction whereby the vehicle results in a transformation of the tenor while at the same time gathering to it certain concepts and dissociating others: 'The metaphor selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the principal subject.'[66] A good example of filtering is found in Brettler's analysis of the metaphor 'God is king' in the Psalms.[67] He showed well how only positive aspects of kingship were associated with the rule of the deity as portrayed through the metaphors of monarchy in the Psalmic literature. Negative assessments found of earthly kings (as in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic literature) are not found in conjunction with the deity. They are rhetorically filtered out or obscured by the positive imagery employed.

Ricoeur speaks of an 'is and is not' aspect to the interpretation of metaphor.[68] The tenor of the metaphor is the vehicle and is at the same time not the vehicle. Brueggemann has drawn on this concept of metaphor to suggest that with respect to language about the deity Yahweh, the tenor (God) is not fully comprehended by the vehicle.[69] In Ricoeur's theory the interaction of the two concepts creates a potential third model (and a seemingly endless number of possibilities because the interpreter's context determines to some extent this third conceptual step). Metaphor contains the potential to inspire and generate new meaning through its 'is/is not' character. In cognitive-linguistic theory, the idea of generating something new is discussed as blending, whereby an imaginative space is created between two conceptual domains that involves new elements not indigenous to either source domain.[70] A new concept is created between the tenor and the vehicle that is not expressed by either alone. Furthermore, a cognitive understanding of metaphor includes the idea that an interaction between the images in the metaphor can function as persuasion because it requires effort on the interpreter to grasp the meaning of the comparison. In other words, the metaphor requires some work on the part of the interpreting audience, who can be persuaded by the meanings generated through the interaction of the terms in the metaphor.

Another facet of metaphor theory takes account of the clustering of metaphors and the affect they achieve as with Kittay's understanding of the relational and cultural context of metaphor use. The generation of new

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[65] LAKOFF AND JOHNSON, Metaphors We Live By; LAKOFF AND TURNER, More Than Cool Reason. For a convenient and up-to-date explanation of the cognitive-linguistic approach with generous citations for further reading, see KÖVECSES, Metaphor.

[66] DILLE, Mixing Metaphors, 7.

[67] BRETTLER, God is King.

[68] RICOEUR, The Rule of Metaphor.

[69] BRUEGGEMANN, Theology of the Old Testament, 230–233.

[70] The classic study is FAUCONNIER AND TURNER, The Way We Think. Cf. KÖVECSES, Metaphor, 267–283.

metaphors creates a panoply of images that function iconoclastically. In Ricoeur's articulation of this aspect of metaphor, 'Every symbol is iconoclastic in comparison with some other symbol'.[71] The important point is how a variety of metaphors interact together, which can result in the subversion of a dominant image as with the case of the divine warrior juxtaposed with the woman in labour in Isaiah[72] or obfuscation as with the case of multiple images used of Yahweh in Ezekiel obscuring any single image of the deity.[73]

The ways that metaphors are regarded in philosophical and cognitive studies resonates with the work done by Bjørndalen on allegory as found in the biblical literature.[74] His work on defining metaphor and elucidating how it works as well as the additional work on figurative language done by Nielsen provide a convenient summary of aspects of metaphor theory suitable for use in a biblical context.[75] Bjørndalen draws on theoretical studies of metaphor as well as examples from the biblical literature to argue that metaphors are recognized by a disjunctive use of two elements, metaphor communicates, different meanings are activated by the speaker and the hearer due to filtering (activating some elements and not others), and these images occur within a scriptural context that generates meanings of the interaction between the two elements of the metaphor within that context. Nielsen builds on his work and highlights the creative potential of metaphorical language, speaking of it as informative and preformative.[76] Informative relates to the meaning generated by the metaphor as understood through the cultural codes in which it was produced as well as within its literary context. Preformative refers to the relation of the new meaning created by the metaphor applying an image that influences the hearers' attitudes and action.[77]

Metaphor as understood in more recent treatments cannot be reduced to a translation or a substitution.[78] It exerts linguistic as well as cognitive

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[71] RICOEUR, Symbolism, 354.

[72] DARR, Like Warrior, Like Woman.

[73] MIDDLEMAS, Transformation, 134.

[74] BJØRNDALEN, Untersuchung zur allegorischen Rede.

[75] NIELSEN, There is Hope for a Tree; EIDEVALL, Grapes in the Desert.

[76] NIELSEN, There is Hope for a Tree, 47.

[77] NIELSEN, There is Hope for a Tree, 47, 56–60.

[78] A metaphor cannot be replaced by or substituted with its interpretation. For example, the use of whoring in conjunction with Jerusalem figured as a woman in Ezekiel does not simply mean that the leaders of ancient Israel entered into political alliances with other nations. The metaphor generates a new idea about sexual promiscuity and female Jerusalem that has its own life as it were. See the discussions of this by NIELSEN, There is Hope for a Tree, 33–35, 60–62 and MOUGHTIN-MUMBY, Sexual and Marital Metaphors, 1–16.

force. It generates something new that has the potential to affect an audience, to persuade, or to foster adherence. Furthermore, many metaphors function together to de-emphasize the prominence of one metaphor alone. Metaphorical speech of the divine can function to generate images that convey divine presence especially when they appear in contexts that could be interpreted as evocative of divine absence.[79] In the interest of space, I focus on the use of metaphors within Ezekiel and Hosea, where there was a clear aversion to a physical image of Yahweh. The hope is to establish the groundwork to enable the consideration of the function of metaphorical speech about Yahweh more broadly.

Ezekiel and Metaphor

Ezekiel has developed a clear stance against the association of images with Yahweh – as part of a strategy to ensure holiness, to reinforce a sense of the total otherness of the deity, and to motivate the allegiance and respect of the worshipper. It is certainly paradoxical then that the prophet used metaphorical rhetoric in support of his larger agenda. The prophet was even known as, indeed deserving of, a reputation as 'a maker of metaphors'(הלא ממשל משלים הוא; Ezek 21.5 [20.49]). His role as a creator of metaphors especially in conjunction within the Oracles Against the Nations (chs 25–32) and in association with the Phoenician city-state Tyre has been studied intensively by Carol Newsom. Newsom observes that in the Oracles Against the Nations the prophet employs elaborate metaphors that are consistent with how the nation represented itself or associations the ancient audience would have made, to scrutinize them, and demonstrate the appropriateness and inevitability of Yahweh's judgement.[80] Metaphors are then employed in order to result in a perceptional shift among Ezekiel's audience and, in fact, to persuade them to the prophet's understanding of the deity and divine interaction in the human realm.[81]

Otherwise the prophet's use of metaphor has been analyzed within the context of the whole collection, especially with attention to how it functions as part of the prophetic discourse. Julie Galambush has examined in

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[79] Scribes in the ancient world and in ancient Israel seemed to know that they were using metaphor to achieve different effects, see LONG, Dead or Alive?, 518–523.

[80] NEWSOM, A Maker of Metaphors, 191.

[81] The use of audience here is not meant to imply that I understand Ezekiel's prophecies as having been mediated orally. They might have been, but it is generally agreed and understood that Ezekiel's prophecies are more literary in nature, as part of written prophecy, and even conceived as such from its inception. This invites different interpretive strategies. Audience can then be understood as readers as well as hearers. On this more generally, see DAVIS, Swallowing the Scroll; MCKEATING, Ezekiel, 13; GALAMBUSH, Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel, 80.

great detail what have been generally referred to as the allegories of the cities Jerusalem and Samaria in Ezekiel 16 and 23 within the rhetoric of the prophet, with special attention to the failure of the cities as women to be redeemed over the course of the book. In her assessment of the literature, she argues that Ezekiel's literary strategy is better understood as 'narrative metaphor.'[82] Ezekiel employs elaborate and extensive literary metaphors in order to illustrate the political failures of ancient Israel's leaders and society. Another synchronic study is that of Ellen Davis, who regards the lengthy metaphors found in Ezekiel as a feature of the narrativity of the book. Literary prophecy (prophecy conceived of and written with prosaic norms rather than poetic ones) requires different interpretive strategies than that of prophetic books where poetry and oracles conveyed the prophet's message.[83] Extensive and elaborate metaphors engage the reader (and the reader's imagination) to encourage reader response as well as assent. In an assessment of rhetorical strategies in the context of Ezekiel and with regards to hints of divine presence, it is important to take into consideration metaphorical speech and how it functions, especially as metaphor creates images for the interpreter.

Among the rhetorical strategies utilized in conjunction with the deity in Ezekiel is the employment of divine imagery, which paradoxically contributes to the abolition of iconography and concomitantly the absence of the worship of other deities and the abolition of an image of Yahweh. However iconoclastic he seems to have been, Ezekiel was at the same time fond of the use of metaphor, even in depictions of the deity. The question then arises about how the use of elaborate imagery in the form of metaphor contributes to an aniconic goal, given that metaphors by their very nature are imagery. A variety of metaphorical usages are employed of the deity, many in immediate succession in the first two visions in the book of Ezekiel: Yahweh is likened to a human being (אדם) (1.26), a type of mixed form with an upper half of amber and a lower half of fire (1.27; 8.2), a rainbow (1.28), and fire (אש) (8.2). Outside of the vision sequences Yahweh is implicitly the husband figure in the allegories of Jerusalem and Samaria as adulteress women (chs 16, 23), the foster father of Jerusalem in the allegory of ch. 16, and the shepherd of ch. 34. In the final vision of the restored and purified temple the deity is also implicitly figured as a monarch when speaking of the temple as 'the place of my throne and the place

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[82] GALAMBUSH, Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel, 11–20. This is the terminology she prefers, but she also recommends the terms 'extended metaphor' or 'sustained metaphor' as a means of referring to the lengthy and elaborate metaphors found in Ezekiel. Cf. MOUGHTIN-MUMBY, Sexual and Marital Metaphors, 166–168.

[83] DAVIS, Swallowing the Scroll. For a succinct review of discussions of the literality of Ezekiel, see JOYCE, Ezekiel, 7–16.

for the soles of my feet' (43.7). Outside of the first two vision sequences in which it is reported that the prophet Ezekiel sees Yahweh's form, the deity is not actually figured at all. Instead the stress lies throughout the book on Yahweh speaking in the first person form, without a clear form. In the final chapters the emphasis is on temple as the deity's throne and footstool (43.7). Therefore, it is only in the first two divine visions that the deity is actually literarily figured in a visual form and these will be the point of departure for an examination of Ezekiel's contribution to divine presence through the use of metaphor.

When the prophet Ezekiel is purported to see the deity, a variety of images are employed to capture a sense of the deity's form, including fire, rainbow, human being, and what could be regarded as a mixed form described in terms of fire and light. The variety of images function to obfuscate any one figuration of the deity, as if to becloud the deity in a robe of images. They act like a blurred photograph. The clustering of divine visual expressions functions to draw new meaning between the interaction of the images through association and dissociation. The human form of Yahweh interacts with the fire imagery, the rainbow, and the amorphous mixed form, with the greatest emphasis being on light and brightness. In this respect, the multiplicity of images achieves a clustering effect (analogous to Kittay's and Ricoeur's exploration of this phenomenon), subverting any single image, but nevertheless emphasizing the manifestation of divine presence.

Another effective rhetorical strategy employed in Ezekiel to achieve a similar result could be the use of the unique qualifier 'the form like the more general appearance of', דמות כמראה, which marks a simile. There has been a significant amount of discussion about whether similes function at the same level as metaphors. Black originally thought that they did not and Ricoeur writes of them as 'weakened metaphors' whose impact is watered down.[84] Janet Soskice presents a better understanding and that is what is followed here.[85] She distinguishes between images that merely seek to describe and those that function exactly as a metaphor – containing informative and preformative aspects. With regards to the simile דמות כמראה used in conjunction with Yahweh's appearance, we find a simile that functions as a metaphor by creating new meaning, implying an is/is not, and seeking to involve and persuade the interpreters in the creation of new ways of thinking and perceiving.

The unique simile דמות מראה is employed twice in Ezekiel, in conjunction with the description of divine presence as אדם (a human being) and as

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[84] RICOEUR, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 248.
[85] SOSKICE, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 58–61. MACKY, *The Centrality of Metaphor*, also includes simile use as found in the biblical literature as metaphor.

אש (fire) (1.26; 8.2). When the divine presence was comparable to a human being, the metaphor generates an image of a formed deity that resembles the appearance of a person. At the same time, the use of the simile distances the deity from an actual human being, so that while Yahweh is like an אדם, the deity is also unlike an אדם. In Ezekiel, Yahweh's *morphé* is not אדם, but rather 'a form like the more general appearance' of a human being. Furthermore, the image supplied to the audience resonates with the creation story of Gen 1.26–28 and of Adam and the anthropomorphic God who walked in the garden.[86] The simile invites the audience to make associations in a blended space and to perceive the deity as similar and dissimilar to an אדם. A similar interpretation is available with the comparison to fire in 8.2. The simile functioning like a metaphor generates the image of a formed deity, taking the shape (or relative shapelessness) of fire. Again, the deity is like and unlike (having 'the form like the general appearance of') fire and the audience perceives this in the mind's eye and makes other associations, one of which would surely have been Moses' burning bush in the Exodus story. The two similes function together to emphasize and promote a sense of formlessness – something accessible to the human being, but completely other than a human being. In this respect, metaphor makes available more than one image for Yahweh instead of privileging one. In addition, the comparative functions to imply that images only approximate the deity and never fully grasp the divine form. Further, the similes act as metaphors that evoke thoughts from ancient Israel's tradition history and thereby broaden the interpretation of Yahwistic images according to the knowledge of the interpreter and the emphases made in the setting in which they are interpreted.

Hosea and Metaphor

Similar rhetorical strategies are found in conjunction with the deity in the book of Hosea, which is itself comparable to Ezekiel. Hosea shares a number of features in common with Ezekiel: the central concern with idolatry (otherwise discussed in terms of false worship or illicit cultic practice), the appearance of sexual and marital metaphors, the use of lengthy and elaborate recitations of traditions, metaphors that seem to transform oral speech into the written word, references by name to only one deity other than Yahweh (Baal in Hosea and Tammuz in Ezekiel), and a theology informed by the transcendence of the deity. In distinction to Ezekiel's emphasis on the divine reputation, Hosea repeatedly emphasizes Yahweh's love and

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[86] For an analysis of אדם in this material with an exploration of how the figure remained an undifferentiated human being until the creation of the female, Eve, see TRIBLE, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality.

compassion towards partner Israel,[87] but both collections, nevertheless, contain the deity speaking in the 'I' form. In addition, (and similar to Psalm 139) the issue at stake within the prophetic collection is idolatry and the prophecies as redacted provide a defence of Yahweh against the worship of idols and other deities. A variety of images are employed in the support of the priority and incomparability of the deity. A convenient list appears in Hans Walter Wolff's thorough commentary on Hosea: Yahweh is like a husband (2.2, cf. 2.7, 16), a father (11.1), a physician (7.1), a fowler (7.12), a lion (5.14), a leopard (13.7), a she-bear (13.8), the dew (14.5), the dawn (6.3), the rain (6.3), a cypress (14.9), a moth (5.12), and dry rot/decay (5.12).[88]

Metaphor plays a significant role within the book of Hosea. Hosea is actually spoken of as containing the most striking images in the Hebrew Bible, for the deity as well as for the people (Ephraim, Israel). Moreover, resonating with Ezekiel being called the maker of metaphors, the deity is attributed with conveying divine messages via figurative speech, 'I spoke to the prophets: It was I who multiplied visions and through the prophets gave analogies[89]' (12.11 [10]). Metaphor, in fact, informs the shape of the collection by appearing in and guiding the interpretation of its three main sections: the husband and wife metaphor appears in the first and last sections (chs 1–3 and ch. 14, respectively), while the parent/son metaphor appears in the second part (ch. 11 of chs 4–13).[90] Metaphorical speech, then, functions significantly in the collection of prophecies in Hosea.

In spite of a penchant for the use of metaphor to convey his message, the prophet Hosea famously refrains from the strict metaphor form (A is B) in descriptions of the deity.[91] Instead, Hosea employs the comparative כ ('like') (also similar to what is found in the book of Ezekiel) when figuring the deity. Lest this be taken as a variation of writing style, it is worth noting that when depicting Israel and Ephraim, the prophet employs metaphor and simile. The choice of simile alone with respect to the deity seems to reflect a conscious decision. Moughtin-Mumby regards this as 'a strong reluctance to suggest that anything can *be* Yhwh, making explicit the idea

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[87] Love actually never appears as a motivating factor for divine salvific activity in the book of Ezekiel.

[88] WOLFF, Hosea, xxiv. See also, KRUGER, Prophetic Imagery. For a thorough descriptive analysis of the metaphors employed in Hosea of the deity and how they subvert each other through interaction, see SEIFERT, Metaphorisches Reden.

[89] From דמה I 'to be like, resemble' rather than II 'to destroy' as found in 4.5–6.

[90] It is true that most commentators view Hosea as being constructed of two parts, chs 1–3 and 4–14, but a persuasive argument for a three-fold division has been advanced by YEE, Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea; YEE, Hosea, and I follow her.

[91] KRUGER, Prophetic Imagery, 149.

that objects or beings can only *be like* God'.[92] Moreover, the choice of images for the deity spans relations known from the human realm (parent, husband), animals (she-bear, leopard, moth), and other natural phenomena (dew, rain, an evergreen tree, even dry rot or some type of slow-acting decaying process). Hosea's multiple imaging exploits the full gamut of images available for description. The deity can be understood as like a human being, like animals, but also like inanimate things. The last is particularly instructive, especially in the light of Nielsen's examples of how imaging Yahweh in non-human language draws attention to the otherness of the deity.[93] The similes in Hosea function similarly. Yahweh is ultimately unfathomable, totally other, and the full range of language can only begin to provide a partial portrait (as does the use of the simile form itself).

The rhetorical strategies found in Hosea that are similar to those encountered in Ezekiel raise the possibility that Hosea is similarly engaged in differentiating Yahweh from other fashioned deities and from actual Yahwistic images by employing figurative speech to present a variety of images of the deity. Again, we find a prophet who was strictly iconoclastic, but who equally employed a cluster of images in the depiction of Yahweh to convey a sense of divine presence.

Literary strategies in the prophetic books Ezekiel and Hosea evidence a reticence to use literal language for Yahweh while also revealing the use of a series of images for Yahweh. Moreover, whenever the deity is visualized metaphorically, it is through the use of a comparative. In addition, a variety of images are found employed of the deity, albeit more prominently in Hosea than in Ezekiel. Nevertheless, the imagery is drawn from the human and the natural realms, denoting aspects of the deity that are familiar to the worshipper, but not exactly of the human being. Yahweh is distinctly other. In these ways, the use of metaphor (and similes that act like metaphors) function in texts that are focused on the issue of idolatry (of other deities, but also of Yahweh) to create a sense of the presence of Yahweh, as well as transcendence and incomparability. Yahweh transcends all the categories known from the human sphere and is ultimately unimaginable, even in form. The prophetic collections of Hosea and Ezekiel reveal the destabilization of a concretized Yahwistic image, rather than divine absence, in the aniconic stances found therein. In so doing, they emphasize the presence of the divine through metaphorical speech.

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[92] MOUGHTIN-MUMBY, Sexual and Marital Metaphors, 52. Italics in the original.
[93] NIELSEN, The Variety of Metaphors.

Conclusion

Divine images were abolished in the biblical tradition to make room for a different sense of the presence of Yahweh. Once the correlation was made between the construction of human hands and impurity, even physical symbols in Yahwistic circles had to be eradicated. Similarly, any figuration – even a mental one – that had the potential to become a fixed form, like Yahweh as a human being, was also deconstructed through the strategy of multiple imaging.

In some respects any speech about Yahweh or a deity is necessarily metaphorical. Yahweh as an entity is unknowable as a concept beyond what has been conceived in biblical and extra-biblical literature and inscriptions. Probably the closest image corresponding to Yahweh's actual form is as a human being, in different manifestations like the storm god, the divine warrior, or king.[94] Nevertheless, prophetic figures whose books reveal a concern with issues of idolatry and iconography neither draw language for Yahweh from one traditional conceptual model nor use one consistent image to figuratively speak of the deity. This speaks for the employment of a rhetorical strategy that can be thought of as multiple imaging.

Multiple imaging refers to the technique of using many images of Yahweh (a cluster). These images are metaphors. Metaphors are more than a literary device that substitutes for or replaces another idea. They exert cognitive force by which their use generates new meaning, promotes associations, and results in the interaction and response of an audience. When many metaphors are used, they qualify and subvert each other. As such, they can soften a strong or violent image, strengthen a less powerful one, or even slow down a fast one (as with the image of slow decay and Yahweh in Hosea). Some of the most imaginative and illustrative uses of divine metaphor appear in literature almost exclusively focused on the issue of idolatry. They function in this context to say something about what idolatry is (the manufacture of idols) and what it is not (the employment of multiple images for Yahweh). Their use even suggests that the only way to avoid idolatry in cultic expressions is through the use of multiple metaphors – multiple imaging. When viewed this way multiple imaging contributes to aniconism in practice by resisting the stabilization of the figuration of the presence of Yahweh.

In the end it is constructive to consider various aspects of divine absence, even aniconism, in conjunction with what makes Yahweh present.

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[94] BARR, Theophany and Anthropomorphism, has drawn attention to the fact that the clearest visualization of the divine *morphé* occurs in theophanic passages where the deity is figured in human form.

Multiple images for Yahweh function differently than legal prohibitions, by inviting readers or hearers to participate in the construction of the images drawn upon in the prophets, to imagine, and to use their social and cultural backgrounds in this task. In so doing, multiple images of the deity are created and these achieve something more than a blurring effect, although they do that as well. They provide images that allow people to relate to the deity, while at the same time, providing images with which an audience cannot relate. Multiple imaging evokes a sense of the very nearness of the divine as well as the deity's transcendence, incomparability, and otherness. This strategy promotes a sense of Yahweh perhaps not so readily accessible in prohibitions that seek to create and enforce a space of holiness around the deity. Multiple imaging in the prophets acts as a strategy that resists forming Yahweh in a single, concrete, and stable form. In so doing, it attests to divine presence that is near (available in all of creation) but at the same time far (in the sense of not encapsulated or localized, but transcendent and holy) – divine presence in absence.

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